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Manchester College, Oxford.

CHRISTIANITY IN THE LIGHT OF
RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE.

An Address

BY THE

Rev. J. ESTLIN CARPENTER, M.A., D.Litt.,

ON THE OCCASION OF THE

OPENING OF THE 21ST SESSION.

15TH OCTOBER, 1906.

*The College adheres to its original principle of freely imparting
Theological knowledge without insisting on the adoption of particular
Theological doctrines.*

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CHRISTIANITY IN THE LIGHT OF RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE.

GENTLEMEN,—

The College which calls us together again to-day exists to “promote the study of religion, theology, and philosophy, without insisting on the adoption of particular doctrines.” This study is organised for the most part with a special object, and it is pursued under special conditions. That object is the preparation for the ministry of religion; and the chief of those conditions is freedom from dogmatic control. On the importance of this condition I need not dwell. It is the heritage of more than two centuries of faith and prayer, and we are bound to hand it on unimpaired to the generations to come. At the gate of the oldest of British universities we are its solitary and inconspicuous champions. But the silent homage to it spreads from year to year and land to land, and it is not the property of any sect, or associated exclusively with any type of theological belief. Only recently one of the most renowned divinity schools in America discovered that the Westminster Confession, which had hitherto served as its standard of doctrine, was no part of its legal foundation. It was promptly eliminated, and the great Union Seminary of New York, which counts nearly two hundred students on its roll, became by constitution as free as ourselves. No longer need I vindicate the spiritual significance of this principle for the student of religion. That has been done on important occasions in our recent history with unsurpassed clearness and fervour by the beloved and revered teacher in whose place I speak to you to-day, and his expositions of its

meaning and scope, together with those more widely known writings which have placed him in the front rank of modern English theologians, I commend to your earnest attention. Let me only remind you that it lays on all who come within its range, to teach or learn, austere demands—a love of truth which can overcome all prejudices, courage to face all difficulties without fear, sincerity and simplicity of purpose, patience of heart for tireless labour and unflinching trust.

I.

From the condition I turn to the purpose of your study. You seek to serve your fellow men through the ministry of religion. It matters not whether that ministry be exercised within our four seas or in the Far East; the spiritual needs of man do not differ in England, India, or Japan. The intellectual outlook may indeed vary; the moral tradition, the social organisation, may change. But the fundamental elements of life, the constitution of our moral nature, do not depend on climate, race, or language. Man thinks, feels, hopes, loves, wills, on every continent, from zone to zone all round the earth, and though the interpretations of his experience may differ, its essential factors still remain the same. Beneath his feet the same earth bears him up, over his head arches the same sky, the visible symbols to ancient imagination of the parental powers which produce and sustain him. Everywhere man is born and dies, everywhere he toils and struggles, everywhere he rises and falls, everywhere he blunders and succeeds, everywhere he suffers and aspires, everywhere he sorrows and rejoices; and the mighty sum of energies and desires, of frustrated effort, of achieved progress, of baffled endeavour, of triumphant advance—the victories of the strong, the humiliations of the weak, the oppressions of the cruel, the patience of the lowly, the oppositions of falsehood and truth, of self-aggrandisement and self-renunciation—make up the vast and bewildering scene of our

existence. Through these confusions you seek to find a way that you may become guides to other men. Into the gloom you would bring a light from heaven that your brothers here and there may cease from fighting shadows, and may be at rest. Above the discords you would sound the call to courage, steadfastness, and joy, as those who would say "Be of good cheer, we are not alone, the Father is with us, we can do all things through him who strengthens us." This is the note of religion. It will often be your business to impart knowledge, but you will not stir the hearts of men by instruction alone; the ministry of religion will call upon you to be something more than teachers. You may often resort for special purposes to the Press, and through the columns of the newspaper you may address scores or hundreds for every one that listens to your spoken word; but the preacher must openly declare what the journalist will veil in secrecy and reserve. You will again and again advocate social causes, and temperance and purity, civic betterment and international peace, will enlist your labour; but your work will not be accomplished solely by social reform: do not mistake the part for the whole, or the means for the end. Behind, above, around, within, all human things, is God; and the test of your ministry will lie in your power to make this tremendous and perpetual fact the source of help and gladness to all within your reach. When the young Aberdeen professor, Henry Scougall (in 1677), described religion as the "life of God in the soul of man," he summed up in a pregnant phrase a truth which the seers of all ages hold in common. That this life varies in intensity, clearness, purity, through the dull and grosser media of our human experience, is the testimony alike of personal consciousness and the whole history of faith. To disengage it from its "muddy vesture of decay," and recognise it in the spirit of truth and righteousness and love, to interpret its everlasting claims, to glorify duty by its august sanctions, to inspire trust in its infinite purposes, to create confidence in its

continuous support, this is the task of the ministry of religion. I welcome you to the preparation for it with sympathy ; we are to walk together along common paths. To-day I offer you some counsels, as an elder comrade on the way, concerning the relation of your studies here to your future work.

The method of your preparation for this work must be chiefly determined by your conception of that work itself. Have you come hither as to a lawyer's office or a hospital, to learn the secrets of an honourable craft, or qualify yourselves for a respectable profession ? Have you chosen this, not, indeed, as a path to affluence, but as containing at least the promise of a livelihood with the minimum of effort or competitive endeavour ? Are your tastes literary, and do you prefer the student's desk to the banker's counter or the humbler lines of trade ? Or are you here to be confirmed in your own opinions and trained as the agent of a party or a sect ? Were these, indeed, the motives of your enrolment in our little band, I would bid you recognise at once that you have gravely misconceived the purpose of this College, and I would urge you to withdraw while there is yet time from a vocation to which you have not been called. But if you have been quickened with the awe and love of God, if the vision of his kingdom has arisen, however dimly, before your eyes, if you have felt that life holds no better thing for you than to be (however feebly) the messenger of his truth and righteousness, then remember the nature of the function you assume, and humbly pray for strength to fulfil it. No church, no teacher, no institution, can accredit you. We can transmit to you no commission, confer on you no power, which is not yours already by natural endowment or the grace of God, nor can we place in your hands a book of infallible oracles for you to expound, so that your work shall be done when you have imparted a knowledge of the saving word. Revelation can no longer be interpreted as the inerrant communication of supernatural truth. The great theological change

of the last century in which this College bore its share through the wide learning and the spiritual serenity of John James Tayler, and the philosophical genius and splendid literary power of James Martineau, has cast a wholly new light on the nature and sources of religion, and by inevitable consequence on the work of the ministry. Looking back at fourscore years and ten over the inner meaning of his long labours, Dr. Martineau thus defined their significance:—"The substitution of Religion at *first-hand*, straight out of the immediate interaction between the Soul and God, for religion at *second-hand*, fetched by copying out of anonymous traditions of the Eastern Mediterranean eighteen centuries ago, has been the really directing, though hardly conscious, aim of my responsible years of life."¹ It is upon this foundation that your work now stands, "Religion at first hand, straight out of the immediate interaction between the Soul and God." The value of your service will depend on your ability—first of all to realise, and secondly to interpret and express this solemn truth. You cannot confront it with a light heart. You aspire to be the servants of the Most High; and no college training can command the gifts of the Spirit which will set fit thoughts in your mind, or adequate words upon your tongue. Does the discipline of the class-room, then, count for nothing? If the conception of the ministry in its highest form is that of prophecy, are you thereby exempted from all personal labour, and discharged from the student's tasks? By no means. The spirit indeed bloweth where it listeth, nor is it ours to tell why the divine fire is kindled in one heart while a brother's still remains unmoved. But if we know not the original conditions of God's gifts, we do know something of the means by which they may be quickened and confirmed. A gift that is not cherished will lose alike its value and its force; and a gift of which you can render no account, which you cannot fit in with other parts of your experience, and justify intelligibly at least to

¹ To Prof. W. Knight: *James Martineau, Theologian and Teacher*, p. 540.

some around you, will cease to have meaning either for you or them ; it will fade away, and disappear, and leave you lamenting the illusions of a dream.

What safeguards can we offer you against this dissipation of your first fervours, what helps will foster and expand your seed of life ? In the first place, it is the business of philosophy to set forth clearly and explicitly that which dwells obscurely and confusedly within your mind. It seeks to make intelligible to you the august relationship of God and man, of which you are already dimly conscious. It aims to provide you, not indeed with a solution of all mysteries, but with such a reasoned interpretation of your being and the world in which you live, as shall give firmness and consistency to your thought, and enable you to confront without fear the spirit of denial. " Rationalism," says its latest historian, Mr. A. W. Benn, " is the habit of using reason for the destruction of religious belief." I will subscribe to no such limitation. I am not concerned with the propriety of the use of a word. The writer who thus defines his meaning is entitled to intellectual respect if he is consistent in its application. But he is at least open to the reply that reason has a wider scope and nature than the reasoning which he employs for this end. Reason may indeed undo ecclesiastical formulæ, and compel us in due course to rewrite the creeds. It may call again and again for the reinterpretation of our experience, and in the process it may profoundly modify the experience itself. But it cannot eliminate itself from the world, for it is only because the mind of man and the universe around him are related, that any science is possible at all ; and religion, therefore, which seeks for the unity and meaning of life in the vast order of the whole, can never be anything but rational. To the study of philosophy, accordingly, I commend you as the intellectual foundation of your teaching. Be not afraid of the labours she imposes. She is an exacting mistress, but in the pursuit of her is a high reward. She opens to you the fellowship

of truth ; and to bear witness to the truth, as the author of the Fourth Gospel taught us long ago, it is well worth while to be born, to live, and die.

III.

But there is a second aid to the student of the ministry which possesses a greater power and more penetrating force. The spirit which has discerned visions of beauty must learn to translate them into noble form by familiarity with the works of the great artists ; he can obtain no mastery of line or colour without method. The musician must understand the laws of sound, he must comprehend the modes in which the creators of melody and harmony have employed their themes and combined their instruments, as the expression of the spiritual passions of hope and joy, of sorrow or peace. And in like manner he who would portray the unseen realities of beauty and good, he who would draw from the thousand strings of the harp of life the deathless music of aspiration and comfort, must have learned to behold the prophet's vision, and hear the song of gladness to which the walls of the city of God are for ever rising in our midst. The world at large does not live by philosophy, but by the devout experience of men and women. The ministry of counsel and rebuke, of courage for the struggling, of rest for the storm-tossed, requires that we should understand the heart-secrets of others and know how the leaders of the faith have learned to suffer and be strong. For this purpose the records of the religious life lie open to you. They are not always easy reading. They are often entangled in beliefs which we have discarded, and embodied in forms which appeal to us no more. It will be your task to distinguish between the passing and the permanent elements of religion, and learn how to shape them anew so as to make them potent for the needs of to-day. To this end you must follow them to their sources, and realise their intensest and most vital forms. For the Christian,

the great book of religion is the Bible, and the historic origin of his faith lies in the life and teaching of Jesus. But the study of the New Testament has entered in our time on to new paths, the end of which it is impossible to foresee. The theologians, even of my boyhood, believed that its various authors spoke with one voice of revealed and revealing truth. The nature of Jesus, for example, was matter of historic fact; historic fact could happen in but one way, and the testimony of its witnesses must be uniform from end to end. The Christian life which was founded on the gospel, was equally simple. The precepts of Jesus were the sole and sufficient guide; and the language of devotion amongst us two generations back could find no meaning in the words that were dear to the heart of Evangelical piety. When Dr. Martineau, just half a century ago, preached a famous sermon at Norwich entitled "One Gospel in many Dialects,"¹ the criticism which it provoked disclosed how much his contemporaries had yet to learn. For he pleaded that the truths of Christianity, alighting upon different minds, spontaneously assumed different forms as they were interpreted by varying types of experience. To one the Gospel presented itself as a new Law, and Jesus sat upon the Mount to replace the commandments of Moses with fresh legislation from on high. The appeal of Christ was thus addressed predominantly to our wills, "This do, and thou shalt live." To faithfulness of service was attached the promise of appropriate reward, "Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord." What, then, of the reluctant spirit that struggled to obey the Law and failed, or even that faithfully, discharged the Law and found it wanting? What of the conscience that punctually rendered its legal dues, yet, when all was done that Law required, was still torn with unsatisfied endeavour? What of the aspiring soul that found no peace in the familiar round, and craved a new object of affection that might raise it out of death, and with fresh devotion quench all

¹ *Studies of Christianity*, p. 399.

vain desire? Before the spirit that feels itself enslaved to sin beneath the Law there rises an image of self-sacrificing love, which wakens faith and fills the whole being with new life. What was out of reach to the bondman under rule, immediately becomes possible to the freedom of sonship. The Christianity of the Apostle Paul, reproduced along the lines of Christian history in an Augustine, a Luther, or a Bunyan, presents us with the type of passionate natures which long for something beyond mere ethical control. When the demands of affection are unsatisfied with the moral pieties, they can rest content with nothing short of mystic identification with the power that has lifted them above themselves. It is of the nature of this vehement and tumultuous life that it should express itself through crises of struggle and of peace; that the past should appear enveloped in the shadow of sin, which dissolves by the experience of a moment into a glow of joy. To others, however, it is impossible thus to divide the years either of personal life or of human history into periods of dramatic progress marked by catastrophes of fall and redemption, of resurrection and judgment. The world is already the scene of the divine thought, present since the beginning when the heavenly reason, issuing from the timeless depths of the infinite life, became articulate in the universe we know, and bound together its remotest parts in one intelligible sphere of light and love. Nor could humanity have been overlooked by its illuminating activity. The divine Word must have lighted everyone, and the long story of the race was the continuous self-revelation of the Eternal. Man dwells already, therefore, in two worlds, though the veil of blindness that lies upon his eyes often hides from him the meaning of his heavenly kinship. Only let the healing touch descend, and he discerns that the immensities around him are filled with the heavenly presence, and he himself can feel and think, can love and pray, only because he dwells in God, and God in him. In such high fellowship the barriers of sense are

done away. The vision of the everlasting life is independent of the accident of death. In knowledge rather than in obedient self-mastery or loving self-surrender is the secret of eternal life. God is spirit, and the hour of his true worship has arrived for evermore.

IV.

In some such mode as this could our great philosophic theologian vindicate the diversities of type which the New Testament presents, and declare that we may thereby not only justify the divisions of Christendom, but even cease to wish that they should disappear. The development of New Testament theology during the last fifty years has added many a detail to the picture which he sketched, but the persistent and relentless search for historic truth has somewhat altered our point of view, as is indeed exemplified in Dr. Martineau's own latest work, *The Seat of Authority in Religion*. On the one hand enlarged knowledge of the apocalyptic literature before and after the actual years of Jesus has disclosed the sources of much of the doctrine of the New Testament concerned with the person of the Messiah and the expectation of the judgment and the end of the age. And on the other hand a deeper insight into the forms of religious belief by which the early church was surrounded, has brought to light the remarkable circumstance that some of what were formerly supposed to be its most peculiar ideas and distinctive experiences, were after all shared by other religions and realised under other sacred names. I have already in an Address last year invited your attention to some illustrations of these facts.¹ Let me pass on to another consideration suggested by recent study of the psychology of religion, viz., the connection between doctrine and experience.

The first great constructor of Christian doctrine is the Apostle Paul. The exigencies of his mission required him to frame a defence of Christianity against both Jew and Gentile.

¹ *Christianity in the Light of Historical Science*, 1905.

It was he, accordingly who laid down the main lines of the great interpretation, which the Fourth Evangelist, writing at a later date, could translate into other moulds more closely akin to Hellenic thought. The student of those wonderful letters which are the first records of Christian endeavour, is confronted with an impassioned type of religious life wholly different from that presented in the First Three Gospels by Jesus himself. The Apostle moves off the field of history into an upper world of speculative interpretation, where we stand face to face with a contrast which may be best expressed in the words of the distinguished Principal of Mansfield College :—¹

“As a Teacher there are many men in many lands and times with whom he (Jesus) may be compared ; but as a creative and sovereign personality there are in the whole of history only two or three, if indeed there are so many, with any claim to stand by his side. As a Teacher he is a natural person with historic antecedents, a social environment, a religious ancestry, and a position honourable but not unique among the great masters of mind ; but as a sovereign personality he is a new being, without father, or mother, or genealogy, separate, supreme, creating by his very appearing a new spiritual type or order. As a Teacher we can easily conceive him as a Jew and a peasant, the lineal descendant of the prophets, and near of kin to the Rabbis of Israel ; but there is no harder intellectual task than to relate the sovereign personality to the Jewish peasant, his antecedents and environment.”

This higher personality first appears in the writings of Paul. He wears a radiant form of glory from which all elements of race, language, nationality, have dropped away ; in which, moreover, he is identified with the Spirit, and becomes the source of all the graces and gifts that pervade the Church. His earthly career (if I understand the Apostle aright—I know how I differ from the profoundest of our living students) was only a brief episode between two ages of heavenly glory, one in which he had already in some sense dwelt with God before the world and served as the divine instrument in creation, the other in which, in virtue of his obedience to the cross, he had been raised to the dignity of Lord at God's right hand. There he was endowed with sovereignty

¹ *Philosophy of the Christian Religion*, p. 304.

over the dwellers in the heavenly spheres; there he should triumph over the forces of evil; there he should reign till the final hour when he destroyed at last the enmity of death. Then, when the resurrection and judgment were completed, he should resign his delegated power, return to subjection beneath him who had invested him with his temporary authority, that, in the timeless immensity of being, God might be all in all. Into this cosmic framework the apostle fits his great doctrines of the destinies of Israel, the significance of the Law, the conflicts of sin and righteousness, the meaning of Christ's redemptive death, the gifts of the Spirit, the organic unity of the Church, the mystic identification of the believer with his heavenly Lord. And the root of the whole lies, as all serious interpreters are now agreed, in that great moment when (to use his own phrase) it was the good pleasure of God to reveal his Son in him. That mighty change produced an experience so intense that the apostle could only compare it to death, burial, and resurrection. He, too, has been crucified. The old man lies in the grave; he feels himself new made; he has already risen and sits in heavenly places; he, too, is on the way to a share in the great consummation. To meet his Lord he will be caught up into the air, and he looks forward to judging angels. To explain this change, to account for corresponding changes in those to whom he writes, to set the new life of which he is the herald in the purposes of God for Israel on the one hand and the Gentiles on the other, to find a place for Christ in the mysteries of the Father's providential guidance of the world, he uses the scriptures of his people, the phases of contemporary belief, the theology of the Pharisees, the hopes of apocalyptic visionaries, and reasonings of his own, all fused together in one glow of impassioned trust. Powers and processes, the physical and the spiritual, moral energies emerging anon into personality and then dropping back into impersonal indefiniteness, a world-system conceived on a scale which our astronomy has long since broken up, a time-

scheme which history has completely outgrown, blend in the pages of these letters which can never cease to be the inspiration of the missionary, the support of the champion of liberty, the call to personal effort, the consolation of those who have shuddered at unsuspected depths of evil in their own hearts and have sought refuge from their weakness in a higher strength, the joy of those who have humbly learned to walk in the spirit.

Through this bewildering mixture of the real and the unreal the minister of religion who makes the New Testament his chief book of devotion must learn to find his way. And he cannot escape the question, how far is the experience of the believer in the twentieth century bound to conform to that of the apostle in the first? If he inquires of either of the two great creations of modern English religion which, without any tradition or national resources at their back, have thrown their arms all round the world, the Methodism of the eighteenth century or the Salvation Army of to-day, the answer is decisive. There is no access to God but through conversion and the redeeming blood of Christ. The student of Christian history, however, is soon aware that Christian experience assumes many forms, and is mediated by very different agencies. Even within the New Testament itself, how striking is the contrast between the letters of Paul and the apostolic sermons in the book of Acts. Gaze with the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews into the heavenly sanctuary where the great high priest, who was himself the victim of his sacrifice, is seated at the right hand of the throne; pierce through the blinding glare of apocalyptic splendours to the rider on the white horse with a sharp sword in his mouth wherewith to smite the nations; read the sober exhortations of James; examine the forms of post-apostolic thought in Clement, Barnabas, the *Teaching of the Twelve*, Hermas's *Shepherd*, the writings of Justin the Martyr, you will find Christianity presented as an ethical life, a new philosophy, a moral, not a ceremonial law, but the distinctive features of the Pauline

teaching reappear only in the Fourth Gospel and Ignatius, and some of its most characteristic elements have been already dropped upon the way. The type which is held up to us as the rule and norm of our spiritual life, falls into the background of early Christian thought. It was the doctrine of the Word which supplied the basis for the great dogmatic constructions of the Church. It might be too much to say that one half of the apostle to the Gentiles was unintelligible because he was a Jew, and the other half was incomprehensible because he was Paul. A spirit of such rare individuality could work wonders on the souls he personally awakened. But when the magic of his presence was withdrawn, the specific character of his experience failed to reproduce itself, and the Christian organisation of teaching and of life was developed along other lines.

V.

In modern times, however, the experience of communion with the living Christ is earnestly pressed upon us as the essence of Evangelical religion. It is especially connected with certain crises of the moral and spiritual life, the conviction of sin, and the sense of forgiveness.¹ But it is by no means limited to these. The whole sphere of personal welfare and of the interior desires day by day is referred to him. Have we need of divine help in the struggle with evil temper, with envy, jealousy, or base ambition? Do we want strength in the weariness of daily duty? Do we seek increase of faith in seasons of doubt, or in moments of peril exclaim, "Save, Lord, we perish"? The answering aid guarantees the reality of the object of our petitions, and becomes the inexpugnable witness of the truth. There is an apparent finality about this evidence which makes any attempt to analyse it seem like a rude intrusion into the sanctuary;

And like a man in wrath the heart
Stands up and answers, I have felt.

¹ Dale, *The Living Christ*, p. 36.

But the teacher who does not share the specific forms of these experiences, must needs desire if he can to learn from their exponents how to recognise the validity of their interpretation. The soul is, by hypothesis, in contact with a mighty spiritual power, other than itself and yet within. The question is, under what forms this power is to be recognised. How can we identify it with a historic figure like the living Christ in two natures, divine and human, the manhood being taken into God? If we ask the most learned of Wesleyan divines, Dr. Beet, we shall be informed that this power is no other than the Spirit.¹ It is the Spirit that dwells in the heart of the believer. It is the Spirit that is the source of graces, of faith, hope, and love. It is the Spirit that operates on conscience and affection, and the Spirit is only identified with Christ by a text in St. Paul. Or the Presbyterian, Dr. Forrest, will admit to us that by no conscious distinction can the soul mark off its communion with the Son from communion with the Father,² agreeing in this, it would seem, with the German mystic Suso, nearly six centuries ago, who laid down that in the highest condition of union with God the soul takes no note of the Persons separately.³ The Scotch theologian, therefore, also recognises that he knows that Christ is there only because the Scripture witness tells him⁴; and so we are once more referred back to history. Does the Congregationalist, Dr. Dale, affirm that the record is not needed? Though the Gospels should be blotted from the scroll of time, the testimony of the Church would be sufficient; is there not a continuity of experience for which Augustine and Luther vouch? The Presbyterian demurs; amid the liabilities of extravagance and illusion authority is needed to regulate and correct.⁵ In other

¹ *The New Life in Christ*, 1895, p. 168.

² *The Christ of Experience*, p. 166.

³ Inge, *Christian Mysticism* (1899), p. 178. ⁴ *The Christ of Experience*, p. 206.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 324—333.

words the experience of "the living Christ" does not, after all, authenticate itself. It needs a recognised standard for its guarantee; and that which is invoked to render historic testimony credible, and provide a spiritual vindication of traditional record, requires after all the confirmation of the very authority which it is summoned to support.

I will not now ask how far this type of teaching about the conditions of divine forgiveness coincides with that of Jesus himself. I am not here concerned with ultimate theological truths but with the historic forms of the religious life. The majority of Christendom has fashioned its faith upon other lines, and found the secret of strength not in the Evangelical individualism of the work of the spirit, but in the Catholic conception of sacramental communion. The stress here falls upon the Church with its hierarchy and powers, conceived as the mystic body of Christ; and the Anglican student of Christian mysticism accordingly tells us that "what joins us to Christ is not so much a unity of the individual soul with the heavenly Christ as an organic unity with all men."¹ The central idea of Eucharistic devotion is still, as with Paul, the Passion. But it is worked out in a totally different way. In the daily sacrifice of the mass it is repeated in bloodless fashion on tens of thousands of altars, and the believer in communicating actually feeds upon his Lord. Every student of the Middle Ages knows how exalted was the faith which gathered round the consecrated elements. The enthusiasm of holy adventure poured itself into the legends of the Grail which Tennyson has transmuted for us into permanent types of spiritual endeavour, failure, and achievement. The rapture of union, present more or less in Christian literature ever since Origen interpreted the Song of Songs in terms of the mystic bride of Christ, thrilled through Augustine, and inspired the fiery Bernard or the brothers of St. Victor, Richard and Hugh. If the incidents of impassioned experience are to

¹ Inge, *Christian Mysticism*, p. 68.

determine the forms of faith, let the student consider the work wrought, for example, by Catherine of Siena on her turbulent age. The house still stands at the bottom of one of the hills within the city walls where, in 1367, at the age of twenty, she espoused herself to the virgin Christ. Pass into the great church of San Domenico on the heights hard by, and you enter at the foot of the nave the little Capella delle Volte. It was the scene of many a divine colloquy where she conversed familiarly with Jesus Christ, her spouse. There she gave a little silver cross which she had threaded on her rosary to a poor man, who was none other than her heavenly Lord, who afterwards told her that he would show it on the judgment day to the whole world. There occurred those two strange visions, the first on July 18, 1370, when Christ took away her heart, the second two days later, when he reappeared, bearing in his hand a rosy heart of flame, which he placed in her side; and from that time no contradiction could disturb her. In the chapel dedicated to her, further up the nave, stands a little wooden crucifix brought from a church at Pisa, where the saint had once knelt before it at communion; and Christ (so her confessor Raimund relates) had descended from the cross and imparted to her the sacred wounds.¹ And all the while, in the midst of intense bodily suffering, she is sustained with a holy joy as she tends the sick, ministers to the lepers, comforts the plague-stricken, heals the feuds of the nobles, reconciles the enemies of the state; and at length, by sheer might of spiritual influence, in the face of a corrupted papal court—stabbed in the foot by the Pope's own niece as she knelt in prayer before the altar—she brings back Gregory XI. from Avignon to Rome, and terminates the long exile satirically known as the Babylonish captivity. Unconsumed by incessant toil she conducts an immense correspondence, and composes the dialogues of the soul with Christ, in which (to use the words of the most learned and sympathetic

¹ Drane, *St. Catherine of Siena*, vol. i., p. 307.

English student of her time) we seem to hear "Catherine's rendering into finite words of unspeakable things which she has learned by intuition in that half-hour during which there is silence in heaven."¹ No one can follow the phases of this extraordinary union of the mystical and the practical without the conviction that her energy was fed from unseen springs: must not the Evangelical critic who regards the Catholic faith in transubstantiation as illusory, admit with her confessor, Brother Raimund, "We are in the valley, and we presume to judge concerning what is on the summit of the mountain"?

Or turn to Paris in the most brilliant age of France. Study the life of one, rich, beautiful, accomplished, but unhappily married. On July 22, 1672, she signs a covenant sent to her by her friend, Genevieve Granger, a Benedictine prioress, "I henceforth take Jesus Christ to be mine, and I give myself to him, unworthy though I am, to be his spouse. I ask of him in this marriage of spirit with spirit that I may be of the same mind with him, meek, pure, nothing in myself, and united in God's will. And, pledged as I am to be his, I accept as a part of my marriage portion the temptations and sorrows, the crosses and contempt, which fell to him." Read the story of her philanthropies, her friendships, her imprisonments. It is Mme. Guion,² whose hymns, through Cowper's translation, have long been part of our English devotion. To her, too, as to the devout nuns of Port Royal, the secret of strength in sorrow and suffering and persecution lay in the august privilege of the Eucharist. "O happy minds and blessed souls," says Thomas à Kempis, "who have the privilege of receiving thee, their God, with devout affection, and in so receiving thee are permitted to be full of spiritual joy."

There was, however, another aspect of Christ in mediæval thought. If in the one character he was seen again and again as

¹ Gardner, *Hibbert Journal*, April, 1906.

² *Life*, by Upham, p. 98.

a gentle child or tender lamb within the holy bread, at other times he loomed vast and dreadful as the *Rex tremendæ majestatis*, the judge who hurled the sinner into hell. Already, in the fresco, formerly attributed to Orcagna, in the Campo Santo at Pisa, he stands in the terrific attitude in which Michael Angelo afterwards depicted him in the Sistine chapel. There, however, the Virgin Mary appears as intercessor, just as in other schemes of thought Christ had himself interposed for sinners before the Father's wrath. Everyone knows how many are the elements which contributed to exalt her as she rose before the believer, head of all martyrs, queen of the heavenly choir, protectress of the family and the state, mother of the Creator and spouse of God. By her obedience, purity, humility, and self-sacrifice, she takes part with the Trinity in the Incarnation, and thus has her share in the redemption of the world. She even participates in the Passion of her Son, offers him to the Father, and realises at least the anguish of consent. Once more, I am not concerned with the truths of theologic forms, but with the manifestations of religious experience. The whole of life is entrusted to her care. Her joys, her sorrows, become the spiritual types to which the believer looks and is enlightened. The great monastic orders laid their self-renunciations at her feet. In her name and to her chastity was knighthood consecrated. She was the inspiration of poetry, and the supreme object of art. The peasant among the mountains still places his home and his fields under her guardianship; and the cultivated people of the city find in her no less their refuge and strength. Wandering one day among the ecclesiastical antiquities of Paris, I entered a chapel in one of the oldest churches in the Latin quarter. Its walls from floor to roof were crowded with hundreds of tablets which all told the same tale with strange monotony. They all belonged to the terrible year 1870-1871. Here were recorded the fulfilments of vows for husband, father, brother, and son, serving in the trenches during the siege. Here

were thanksgivings for deliverance, for rescue from danger by wounds, famine, or disease, during that dreadful winter, as whole families were united in safety and in faith. It was a spectacle of infinite pathos. What suffering, what anxiety, what consolation! For the desires that were not granted there were no tablets of resignation. But if religion is to be founded upon experience in answer to prayer, how can the Evangelical deny the Catholic's plea?

VI.

But the argument may be carried one step further. If we discern "One Gospel in many Dialects" within the limits of the New Testament, if the Christian churches, age after age, produce fresh varieties of sacred speech, intelligible at least to their day and generation, by the exaltation of the few or the faith of the many, what shall be said of the other voices in the great chorus of the world's religions? Are they not, too, members of the same wide fraternity of tongues? It was a saying of Augustine that there is no false doctrine which fails to contain some truth—*Nulla falsa doctrina est quae non aliqua vera intermisceat*.¹ Had Augustine ever read the "Lord's Song" or *Bhagavad-Gītā*, the most sacred book of the followers of Vishnu, he would have found a remarkable application of his principle. It comes to us incorporated in one of the two colossal epics of Indian literature, the *Mahābhārata*. There it is strangely inserted as an episode in the struggle between the sons of Pāndu and the son of Kuru. The hosts on either side are arrayed for battle, when the knight Arjuna (one of the sons of Pāndu), stricken with remorse at the approaching slaughter, addresses Krishna, who acts as his charioteer. Krishna is, in fact, the incarnation of the beneficent God, Vishnu, creator and sustainer of the world. He answers with a discourse on the heavenly wisdom or mystic knowledge by which the believer shall be freed from sin, and

¹ *Quest. Evv.* ii. 40.

united in spirit with the universal Lord. In its present place it would seem to have received additions in the interest of more than one philosophic school. Its date cannot be determined with any certainty, though there is good reason for thinking that its earliest form may be carried back at least two centuries before our era. It breathes so exalted a piety that it has been gravely argued that it had felt, though far off, the touch of Christ. The attempt of an enthusiastic German, Dr. Lorinser (1869), to prove that its author was acquainted with all the Gospels, the Book of Acts, and all the Epistles except those to the Thessalonians, Philemon, and the Hebrews, has not, indeed, found any support. But when so cautious a scholar as Professor Hopkins (of Pennsylvania) makes an elaborate comparison of it with the Fourth Gospel,¹ his argument in favour of the dependence of the Indian poem, though not to me convincing, must be heard with respect. The higher thought of India (as is well known) soared far above the traditional scriptures with their superstructures of ritual and Law. These belonged to the lower scheme of works and merit, which detained the agent in the round of transmigration. From this the philosophy of religion sought to lead him into the world of spiritual reality beyond all change. The Pauline gospel was more closely involved in legal categories, especially in its account of the death of Christ by which the Law was proved to have undone itself. The Hindu sage is not embarrassed by the necessity of linking the incarnate Vishnu with the ceremonial system. The conceptions of divine promise and purpose, which play so large a part in Pauline thought, are lacking in India, and law and ritual could be more easily referred to a lower plane. The language of sacrifice which gathers round the person of the Messiah finds no place, therefore, in the story of Krishna. He is the incarnation of Vishnu sent forth to deliver men from their sins, to overcome the powers of evil,

¹ *India, Old and New* (1901), p. 155.

and to establish the rule of righteousness on earth. His death, however, by the stray shaft of a hunter, who implores his forgiveness and is immediately sent to the world above in a heavenly car, possesses no kind of redemptive value. In a scheme which provided an exact moral equivalent for every thought and act of good or evil, according to the doctrine of the Deed (Karma), no form of vicarious atonement was possible. On the other hand, above the religion of works rises, in the "Lord's Song," the religion of *bhakti*, fervent devotion or love. The ultimate principle of salvation, indeed, as in the Fourth Gospel, is knowledge. "Coming into this knowledge," says the Lord, "men become one in nature with me."¹ But this knowledge is attained through fervent love. "By love he knows me in truth, who and what I am; then knowing me in truth he forthwith enters into me."² "Have thy mind on me, thy love towards me, thy sacrifice (used metaphorically of worship) toward me; do homage to me."³ "Abandoning all righteous deeds (*i.e.*, reliance on works as the means of salvation), see me as thy sole refuge. I will deliver thee from all sins." The doctrine of "mutual inherence," as the late Dr. Moberley designated the Pauline and Johannine view of the relations of the believer and Christ, reappears in the promise of Krishna to the disciple: "They that worship me with love dwell in me, and I in them."⁴ And the salvation of the true believer, however guilty be his past, is sure: "Even though he be a doer of exceeding evil that worships me with undivided worship, he shall be deemed good, for he is of right purpose. Speedily he becomes righteous of soul, and comes to lasting peace. O son of Kunti, be assured that none who is devoted to me is lost."⁵ The demand of God from man, the condition of true worship, is love. The response of God to man is expressed in *prasāda*, identified in the physical world with clearness or radiance; in the inner realm with calmness and serenity of mind, or, when directed towards others, with favour

¹ xiv. 2.

² xviii. 55.

³ xviii. 65-66.

⁴ ix. 29.

⁵ ix. 30-31.

or grace. This is the ultimate possession of the believer: "If thou hast thy thought on me, thou shalt by my grace pass over all hard ways."¹ "In him seek refuge with thy whole soul; by his grace thou shalt win supreme peace, the everlasting realm."² Here, then, is a religion of incarnation, which is at the same time a religion of revelation and deliverance; and Krishna declares; "I am born age after age for the saving of the good, the destruction of evil-doers, and the establishing of virtue (or religion)." Religiously the world is the creation of a gracious God. It is brought forth by his free grace, and his beneficence in its production becomes the type for his human worshipper. He guides its course, holding the door of deliverance open to all who seek it; and accordingly we read: "He who serves me with unswerving endeavour of love becomes fit for the partaking of the divine nature (Brahmahood). For I am the image of Brahma, of the eternal and infinite, of the everlasting truth, and of absolute joy."³

The story of Hindu theology is full of bewildering intricacies which are hardly likely even to arouse the passing interest of the ordinary Western believer. But they are assuredly of profound significance to the student of religious experience. For similar facts must be explained by similar causes; and corresponding types of trust and endeavour imply like play of thought upon the vicissitudes of the spirit within. Why, asked the ancient sages long before, should some men have reached the vision of reality, and discerned the identity of the self within the heart with "the True of the True," the absolute and universal? It was because their eyes had been opened, and the Great Self had chosen them for his own. Here was already a doctrine of election; the religion of devotion or love readily suggested a variety of fresh problems which the subtle speculative activity of the Hindu mind delighted to throw into quaint imaginative forms. Was salvation due to the irresistible and free action of

¹ xviii. 58.

² xviii. 62.

³ xiv. 26-27.

God, or did it depend in any way on the co-operation of man? Where lay the initiative, in divine grace or human endeavour? The disputants on the one side advanced the argument of the cat. "God seizes the soul," they urged, "and saves it, just as a cat carries away its little ones from danger." "Nay, rather," replied the advocates on the other, with the argument of the monkey, "the soul seizes hold of God, and saves itself by him, just as the young one of the monkey escapes from peril by clinging to its mother's side." And out of these dilemmas arose yet another. How can God, if he is just and good, resolve to choose some and pass over others? Or, from the counter point of view, if he is Almighty, how can there be action of human wills independent or opposed to his? Or yet, again, when faith and grace have once been given, can they be forfeited, or is the perseverance of the saints assured? ¹

Why should I fetch these items of controversy out of the obscurity of a distant land? For two reasons:—In the first place they warn us against what may be called provincialism in religion. The types of faith and life, with which we are familiar, are not all unknown elsewhere. The mysteries of God and the secrets of the soul have been the age-long objects of devout thought without as well as within the pale of Christendom. But, secondly, they have never had so firm a seat in specific human personalities. They have not been embodied in a great tradition which guarded their noblest forms against dispersal in vague clouds of myth. No one would compare the legends of Krishna in the Purānas with the story of the Gospels, except for some curiosity of occasional detail. The Christian student for the ministry of religion returns, therefore, to the first interpreters of Christian experience, the first creators of Christian theology, to Paul and John. Is it simply to repeat their phrases? Nay, but to get back through them to the Master who stands above them both. The reply to the philo-

¹ Barth, *Religions of India*, p. 227.

sophic inquirer who seeks for the differentiation of Christianity among the religions of the world is not difficult to find. Paul and John have the same explanations. In Pauline language it is "the spirit of life in Christ Jesus." The Johannine Jesus uses the same great word: "I am come that they may have life, and may have it abundantly." And this spirit has two aspects. As it looks out on man it begets human helpfulness:—"I am in the midst of you as he that serveth." As it looks up to God it prompts the surrender of sonship:—"Father, not my will but thine be done." Here are the inspirations of duty and faith. Service and trust must be the two keys of your future work. I do not say that they will unlock all mysteries. There are secrets of discipline and destiny which God keeps in reserve: they are known only to those who enter into the joy of their Lord. But on these two mighty impulses the vast fabric of the Church has been erected. We have been told lately that in the teaching of religion, even to children, the Gospels must be interpreted by the Church. I believe that to be profoundly true, if we are agreed on what we mean by the Church. If we have only in view the decisions of its councils and the propositions of its creeds, it is sufficient to reply that the clauses of the *Quicunque vult* do not help me to understand the Sermon on the Mount. But if we have regard to the totality of believers, one great fact will emerge through all varieties of doctrine and rite. The fundamental and impelling power that unifies the whole, that sends the missionary to distant lands, or the martyr to the stake, or the scholar to his desk, or the nun to her works of charity, or the Sunday School teacher to his class—that keeps the great host of faithful workers in all times and lands for God and man at their posts of duty, and sustains the "dim common populations" as they bear the sorrows and endure the hardships of our mortal lot,—is the *imitatio Christi*, the effort, how often inarticulate and baffled, but never wholly futile, to appropriate and reproduce some element in the experience of Jesus. This is

the witness of Christian history, and this is what makes its study an aid of the highest importance to the Christian minister. We are learning now that the fellowship of the Spirit of Life is wider than any creed, and God gives us access to it in many different ways. He who seeks to be its minister to other men, must learn to carry it into fields unvisited by Jesus; into the devotion to truth, which is the glory of science, and the love of beauty, which is the secret of poetry and art; into the industrial enterprises reared on the toil of the people; into the purposes of civic and national welfare in the great fight with ignorance and suffering and sin; nay, I may add, into the obscure impulses which bring races and civilisations into conflict, and the means which may secure the pre-eminence of the Prince of Peace. Be not alarmed. You are not called to do all these things at once. But you are called to recognise that as life slowly tends to grow more complex, the demands upon the ministry will continually increase. I set before you, therefore, high aims, and I ask you to give to the College your best energies. On the threshold of a venerable chapel in Numidia was carved the inscription, *Bonus intra, melior exi*. The aspiration of the ancient worshipper may well become the modern student. A college that is dedicated "to truth, to liberty, to religion," must needs be a sanctuary of faith and prayer. I cannot predict for you an easy life: you are content to face the unknown future with a cheerful trust. The lines will not always fall to you in pleasant places, and you may be early confronted with grim facts of failure or pain. But if you have learned the lesson of discipleship, and are able to say in humble confidence with the Apostle Paul, "Our sufficiency is of God," the wonder and the joy of your work will grow even through frequent trial and possible defeat. You may find but small opportunities; your message may only reach a few; you may be for ever haunted by the sense of your inadequacy to realise the greatness of your calling; you may have little share in the redemptive labours of

our age ; you may be excluded from precious fellowship which would sustain your spirit ; what then ? You will be ministers of God—God always working, always teaching, always loving ; God known in the grandeur of the world ; God revealed in the mighty growth of the human spirit ; God recognised by the testimony of innumerable faithful souls ; God calling us for ever forwards to new knowledge, clearer vision, wider truth ; God our infinite source, and God our everlasting goal. And in weakness and obscurity you will still raise the song, “ O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God ! How unsearchable are his judgments and his ways past tracing out ! For of him, and through him, and unto him, are all things. To him be the glory for ever. Amen.”
